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at the Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem, Monday, June 7, 1999

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JERUSALEM AND PALESTINE DURING WORLD WAR I

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The day-long workshop devoted to "Jerusalem and Palestine during World War I" is part of a larger program entitled "France, Western Europe and Palestine 1799-1948" organized by the Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem. Following the conference which covered an extensive nineteenth century from 1799 to 1917 (November 9-11, 1998) and before the conference scheduled for November 29-30 to December 1, 1999 which will focus on the Mandate Period (1917-1948) there was an obvious need to examine the first global conflict.

World War I in the Orient, and more specifically in Palestine has begun to be better known. Nevertheless, the current data are not sufficient to fully clarify what can rightly be termed a dismemberment. The Ottoman Empire's entry into the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary in early 1914, the expulsion of political representatives and citizens – in particular the clergy – of France, Great Britain and then Italy, the Islamization associated with the overblown Ottomanization policy of the Turks, the situation in the Holy Land initially far removed from the front lines and then the Palestine campaign itself with the harsh living conditions it created for the various sectors of the population -- this whole series of violent events led inevitably to radical changes in the givens of the region. The climax of this upheaval was the fall of Jerusalem on December 9, 1917, signifying the end of four centuries of Turkish rule and the beginning of a new but no less troubled era for Palestine first under the occupation and then the British Mandate.

The three years of Palestinian involvement in war time activity (both directly and indirectly) highlights one of Palestine's prime features as the theater of disproportionate international rivalry that derives directly from its symbolic value (the conference held in November 1998 clearly

demonstrates this point[1]). The war apparently turned this forgotten province of the Empire into a major player from a buffer or transit zone at the crossroads of larger geographic spheres – Egypt and the Mediterranean on the one hand and Northern Turkey and Mesopotamia or the Arabian peninsula on the other. In addition, the War reshuffled the cards, and reinforced certain demands that had in the past been dismissed or underestimated. This was true for the political arena as well as the psychological sphere: the war forged a genuine change in mentalities, forcing the parties involved to adapt despite themselves.

The purpose of this workshop was to delve more deeply into these raw data. By re-examining old and fragmentary work mostly devoted to the fate of the Yeshuv, and classic works dealing with the Balfour Declaration or the issue of Syria, this workshop was designed to examine military operations, and then make the connection between religion and politico-military affairs.

As regards the structure of the workshop itself, a number of general comments are in order. All the contributors for example stressed the major problem of sources; the paucity of knowledge on this period is primarily due to a lack of precise documents.

Although in general there is prolific documentation on Palestine, there is a dearth of information for the war years. Domestic first hand evidence is particularly scarce (the chancelleries for their part continued to take a strong interest in this area). This evidence is often only found after complicated searches, in those instances when the material itself was not destroyed in whole or in part by the events of World War I or II. The workshop, by bringing together researchers working on this period, helped fill in the gaps by adding pieces to the puzzle or by independent confirmation of data. It also highlighted the importance of research on this specific feature of the history of Palestine.

Turning to the papers themselves, Jacob Wahrman (Hebrew University, "Conflicting Reports on the Loss of a French-British Reconnaissance Seaplane in the Wadi Araba early in the War") examines an incident that occurred at the start of military operations in Palestine. The existence of a joint Franco-British reconnaissance mission points to the very close cooperation between two powers which would later become rivals over the fate of Palestine. Wahrman also stressed the modernity of both

[1] See *The Bulletin du Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem*, # 3, Autumn 1998, pp. 163-166. The proceedings of this conference will be published in the Mélanges du CRFJ in May 2000.

information gathering and use. Above all however this incident enabled him to examine how such an incident has been treated in different hands since although extremely specific, the British and German versions of the event differ radically. This is a real challenge for the historian-cum-investigator, which may be forced to turn to what are considered doubtful and hence neglected sources, and must look for the facts where he does not necessarily expect to find them. The danger resides in staying momentarily too close to the facts, which lose meaning when removed from the context of the larger frame of events.

In his paper "Politics, Communication and Intelligence, Germany's Orient policy and the Defense of the Near East," Shlomo Shpiro (Bar Ilan University) examined the German secret service in the Near East and more specifically in Palestine. These military or civilian bureaus reinforced the German presence in the region but also illustrated Germany's belief in its mission in this part of the world. Beginning with the visit of Emperor Wilhelm II to the Ottoman Empire in October-November 1898, the German secret services' prime target was Britain. The alliances in peacetime continued into wartime and gave rise to joint German-Turkish activities. Although their objectives were the same, including the call for a Jihad (holy war), the operations itself were more complex. Methods differed and the German agents, most of whom were recruited in East Africa, found it hard to adapt to their new environment. Their beliefs in German superiority was difficult for the Turks to accept, primarily since the Germans wanted to avoid giving the Turks too much clout, and was part of their long term objective. This resulted a conflict between the army, present in the field and favorable to a certain amount of partnership with the Turks, and the German ministry of foreign affairs who favored a parceling out of responsibilities that would tip heavily in favor of Germany at the end of the war. This is what prompted the Germans at the last minute to oppose a separate peace treaty which Constantinople was tempted to sign. Friction arose as well because of global interests at stake. For instance, the fate of the Jewish population of Palestine would have been quickly and tragically sealed by the Ottomans if Berlin had not taken international political implications into account.

The Palestine Campaign nevertheless ended with a Franco-Italian-British victory. Yigal Sheffy (University of Tel Aviv) in his paper on "Religion, Politics or Strategy? The Occupation of Jerusalem, 1917", selected the highly symbolic episode of Allenby's triumphal entry into Jerusalem on December 11, 1917, as an illustration of the stakes involved in the new Palestine. His entry was the consecration of a military operation and a gesture imbued with meaning. Allenby takes on a humble stance with no attempt to outdo Wilhelm II's glorious entry twenty years earlier. He forbids reproducing the entry of Jesus through the Golden Gate. He

orders that no flags should be flown, to indicate that the event is not an occupation but rather a gesture to civilization. In this regard Y. Sheffy stresses that all the comparisons found in the narratives of the event (Allenby likened to a prophet or Moses) are the product of historiography, rather than a preconceived notion. The conquest of Jerusalem had an uncertain strategic value but is the locus of myths and realities that the historian should take into consideration, given the city's location at the confluent of religious, political and military interests.

The first speaker at the second session, which dealt with religious and political issues, bridged with the preceding military concerns. Jean-Michel de Tarragon (*Ecole Biblique*) dealt with "The Enrollment of French clergymen from Jerusalem in the British and French Intelligence Services." He showed how French clergymen living in Jerusalem who were conscripted August 1914 or were expelled by the Ottomans in December, went to work for the Allies. A high number of clergy served in the medical corps at the Front in France or elsewhere, others were more actively involved in combat. This was the case in particular for a Dominican from the *Ecole Biblique*, Father Jaussen: a specialist in the region having traveled and studied for years there, he was involved as of the beginning of the hostilities in the Orient and was joined later by his Jerusalem colleague Father Savignac. Although we know somewhat more about the circumstances surrounding their recruitment (discussed in the Introduction to the photography catalog of the *Ecole Biblique* "Photographies d'Arabie – Hedjaz 1907-1917, *Institut du Monde Arabe*, Paris, May-June, 1999) his specific reasons remain unclear. The issue of trust, essential to the setting up of a coherent intelligence service (in particular since there was no structure of its kind beforehand) prompted J.M. de Tarragon to formulate a psychological interpretation and hypotheses which will require confirmation. He described some of the intelligence gathering activities of these clergymen well before the war and highlights some little known connections.

While some clergymen were directly involved in military operations (they were seen in uniform in the Holy City at the end of the War), others took part "on paper." In my own presentation, entitled "The Fate of Christian Institutions and Communities of Jerusalem during World War I", I discuss the split among Jerusalem denominations at the start of the War. Although the War and its imperatives affected the religious institutions in Palestine more or less to the same extent, changes in the conflict later placed them on different footings. The buildings associated with countries hostile to the Central Powers and the Ottoman empire were requisitioned, the occupants expelled and the houses transformed for military purposes. In a concerted attempt to eradicate the past, "enemy" clergymen were expelled from Palestine and the buildings which had been the symbols of former privilege were subjected to Ottomanization if not

Islamization. (This is the case in particular for the French national domain of '*Sainte Anne'*, which became a Moslem university.) The reaction from the expelled French clergy was a growing desire for revenge, abetted by a rekindling of the Crusader spirit (with the illusion they had been victorious when Great Britain, a Christian power, took Jerusalem in December, 1917).

The clergy associated with the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary, were allowed to remain in their establishments. Although they too experienced the vagaries of the war, with requisitioning of lodging for officers, their patriotic fiber was nevertheless flattered since for once they did not feel outdone by France, the formerly omnipotent protector of Christians in the Orient. The strict Ottoman rule over Jerusalem even gave rise to certain contacts between Christians which up to then had been rare. This relative concord is described by a prime witness, the Count of Ballobar, in his diaries (Ballobar was the Spanish consul, and at one time handled the interests of almost all the warring parties).

The special status of Jerusalem and Palestine during World War I emerges in a paper by George Hintlian (Christian Heritage Institute, Jerusalem) on the Armenian community in the city. The massacres in Armenia and the Caucasus form the inevitable preface to the description of a community who was placed unwillingly in the limelight. This background, now better known, contrasts even more strongly with the relative preservation of the Armenians in Jerusalem. In his paper G. Hintlian compares the Holy City with Constantinople and Smyrna, other foci of international attention where the Ottomans could not pursue their criminal policies. He places the highly subservient good will of the Djemal Pacha in the same light. This violent autocrat in other circumstances was in this case anxious to protect his image abroad, and only imposed on the Armenians the difficulties endured by the other Christians in the city (to the extent that they did not manifest their nationalistic feelings). An illustration of this common fate is the fact that the Armenian patriarch was deported for several months along with the other patriarchs of the city, towards the end of the War.

Overall, although this workshop cannot claim to have provided the definitive picture of Jerusalem and Palestine during the First World War, the level of scientific cooperation was extremely gratifying. One of the main goals of this encounter was to define to what extent there was a "Pre" and a "Post World War I" in Palestine. The conference slated for 29-30 November and December 1999 will doubtless benefit from the contributions made here.

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